Gandhiji's Conception of Swaraj

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# HARIJAN

(FOUNDED BY MAHATMA GANDHI)

Editor: K. G. MASHRUWALA

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## NOTES

### Sardar's Birthday

Somehow I thought that there was still a month between this day and the Sardar's birthday and would have missed taking note of it even today but for a telegram from the editor of another paper. It is only since some years ago that we have begun to celebrate his birthday publicly, and I understand that October thirty-first has been fixed on the basis of a school certificate. He and his family did not care to keep a record of his date of birth and the makers of the *Janmabhumi Almanac* contend that the correct date ought to be the 17th of October, that is a fortnight earlier, to enable the planets to testify to his greatness. It is in keeping with Sardar's personality that he has attained greatness without allowing the planets to testify to it. The country will celebrate his birthday on the thirty-first and for ever confuse astrologers. Equally he does not need the testimony of the *Harijan* for showing his greatness. This paper is more his than mine and must only speak in a subdued manner in praise of him.

He enters into the seventy-fifth year. There is much yet for him to do for the country, much that he alone can set right. But his advancing age and failing health are a cause of deep anxiety to the nation. The nation would rather wish that it were possible for him to get younger in age and more vigorous in health year after year and there were some sort of arithmetic whereby every birthday could be regarded as making him a year younger.

May God enable him to fulfil the expectations of the people.

Wardha, 26-10-'49

### Ban on Fasts

> "Congressmen will not be permitted to resort to hunger-strike on "frivolous" issues either against the Government or the provincial Congress organization without the previous permission of the Council of the U. P. P. C. C., according to a decision of the Council which has concluded its two day session. Mr. Purushottamdas Tandon presided.
>
> "The Council reviewed about ten cases of hunger-strike by Congressmen during the year, two of which were in protest against "corruption" in the Congress organization. The Council condemned the action of these Congressmen and laid down that 'no Congressmen should resort to hunger-strike without the previous sanction of the Council.'" — P. T. I.

I do think that fasts are often very hastily undertaken and with a wrong mental attitude and motives. Fast is the last weapon of a *Satyagrahi*, and it admits of no harbouring of hatred towards the wrong-doer. But with all that, it must be realized that no *Satyagrahi* can ever apply for permission to be allowed to go on fast; also no organization anxious to keep out adoption of violent methods at least within its own organization, if not with others, could remain chaste if fast is entirely banned. No *Satyagrahi* would also be scared away by the ban if he is convinced that it is the only remedy left; he would not care to remain in the organization with that restriction.

A fast, even if wrongly and maliciously undertaken, is in the first instance violence against oneself. Simply because a man has gone on fast, the organization (or person) against which it is undertaken need not take notice of it, if its own conscience is clear. If the organization is right on its side, the hunger-striker will sooner or later discover that he cannot justifiably keep it on, and will relent. If, however, the fast is just and proper, the opponent organization must thank itself if it is compelled to surrender. If it does not wish to do so, it can only allow the *Satyagrahi* to die.

Consequently, while it may be proper for an organization on a review of cases of fasts to censure improper ones, in my opinion, the Council has over-stepped its limits in asking hunger-strikers to apply to it for permission to go on fast. Can a Council ever give such permission? Why should it, therefore, burden its files and agenda by asking for such applications? The resolution reads curious to this extent.

Wardha, 17-10-'49

### English as It Might Be

This is to cheer up those who are dejected at the prospect of English retaining its position in Government administration for fifteen years more. The protagonists of that language might consent to shorten its duration if for no other reason than getting English representations of the following sample. This is bound to happen as the practice of that language as well as its study under first-class teachers is likely to decrease. These illustrations are taken from a single letter but I get similar ones more often and the strange thing is that often the writers are from Hindi and Gujarati provinces; i.e. could easily write to me in their mother tongue:

> "Be kind enough to spare a room in your esteemed paper for the installation of the same(i. e. our grievances).";
>
> "disposing off their ornaments extra (etc.) for the sake of their hungry bullies (bellies)";

"pass days and nights uneasily and sleepily (sleeplessly)";

"the local population is unsympathetic and unrhythmical";

"until ...... is done, govt. can never be free from the fetters of the achoing headache on one side and the masses on the other".

Wardha, 12-10-'49 K. G. M.

### ADIWASIS IN BOMBAY

"It is no exaggeration," writes Shri Thakkarbapa in a book on Aboriginals, "if I say that the Adiwasis are the poorest section of the Indian population, not excepting Harijans." This is all the more true of the three lacs of Adiwasis in the Thana District of the Bombay Province. More than ten years ago, the Government of Bombay had appointed a special officer, Mr. D. Symington to make a detailed report on the life of the aboriginals and to suggest measures for the amelioration of their condition. In the report which he submitted in March 1938, Mr. Symington said, "the conditions under which the jungle tribes people work and live are wretched in the extreme and the abuses to which they are subject constitute a blot on the administration." But before the then Congress Ministry could do anything substantial to remove the blot, it had to resign from office. In 1940, however, Shri Balasaheb Kher founded the Adiwasi Sewa Mandal with the object of serving the Adiwasis in the Thana District.

Commenting on the Communist-led revolt of the Warlis in 1946 against the tyranny of the landlords and the forest contractors, Shri Narhari Parikh wrote in the *Harijan* at that time, "Such riots are the outward symptoms of a serious disease in the body politic. So long as the root causes of this disease are not removed, a superficial treatment of the outward symptoms would not be of any avail...........Congress Governments are trying to help these people by legislation. But......local Congress workers, landlords and big agriculturists who call themselves Congressmen do not yet fully realize the inherent injustice in the existing order."

The Adiwasi is no more a slave today in the sense in which he was ten years ago, thanks mainly to the silent efforts of the Adiwasi Sewa Mandal and the measures that the Government of Bombay have taken recently. It cannot be said, however, that his economic condition has shown a corresponding change for the better. The above remarks of Shri Narhari Parikh, therefore, regarding the inherent injustice in the existing order, are as pertinent today as they were three years ago.

In spite of the Money Lenders' Act and the Tenancy Act the Adiwasi cultivator has not been completely freed from the clutches of the *sowkar*, the landlord or the forest contractor who advances money against future work. Formerly the methods of harassment were quite autocratic and arbitrary. Now they have taken a more legal form. Legal proceedings are instituted on very flimsy grounds to coerce into submission those Adiwasis who attempt to assert any of their newly acquired legal rights. Formerly, arrears of loans or agricultural rent in years of bad harvest were subsequently recovered either by threats, forced labour, or by fraudulent calculation of wages. On the slightest default now the landlords and the *sowkars* take recourse to the civil, criminal and revenue courts. Ignorant of the processes of law, a large number of Adiwasis are compelled to put up with 'legal' injustice or to make inequitable compromises. The number of such cases is so large that social workers find it physically impossible to run to courts to secure justice or even some sort of legal assistance. For example, for the last two years in succession the paddy crop was considerably affected as a result of irregular rain in Dahanu and Umbergaon *talukas*. Adiwasi tenants could not pay full rents unless they were prepared to starve their families for a longer period than the usual one. In spite of representations the Government did not take any notice. Hundreds of suits for recovery of arrears of rent are at present pending in the Civil or the Mamlatdar's Court. The Adiwasi who has no paddy or cash in reserve to pay up the arrears is thus forced either to borrow money from another *sowkar* or to face the legal consequences. I have come across some cases of eviction in which tenants have been deprived of the land which they have been cultivating for over 30 to 40 years! In one case the tenant has not only been evicted from land but his bullock-cart has been attached by the decree of the Civil Court. In another the tenant's hut was dismantled in his absence and he has been forced to leave the village. I cannot possibly come to know all such cases. But I know that a larger number of tenants has been served with eviction notices this year and that they may be turned out any day within the next few weeks.

Well-meaning Congressmen exhort the Adiwasi tenants to work harder and to grow more food so that the latter would be able to pay rents to their landlords and also keep enough for themselves! These friends fail to realize that the Adiwasi cultivator is caught in a vicious circle of poverty and indebtedness. There are many Adiwasi families who manage to keep body and soul together only by augmenting their meagre supply of rations with bitter wild roots during the months of June, July and August. It is in these months of semi-starvation, however, that the Adiwasi is required to do heavy manual labour in the paddy-fields. He, therefore, borrows money not for improvement of agriculture but to keep himself and his family going. Thus the Adiwasi starves because he cannot grow sufficient food and he cannot grow sufficient food because he starves!

The landlord, on the other hand, evinces no interest in the improvement of the land. He visits it only once in a year for collecting rent from the tenants. But he enjoys a considerable

unearned income merely on the strength of the right of ownership. For many years past there has been no revision settlement in this area and the rates of assessment are much too low. The income from the land, however, has been disproportionately high even from before 1939. "In any case I find," wrote Mr. Symington in 1938, "that rentals are now far too high and it is certain that they do not leave the cultivator sufficient for his livelihood even for half the year." During the war years and after the income from both Kharif and inferior lands has increased by leaps and bounds as the prices of rice and hay have risen to three or four times the pre-war level. Thus today the ratio between the amount of land revenue paid to Government and the income from land received by the landlord in the form of rent, paddy and hay is exceptionally high in comparison to similar ratios in other districts. The following figures amply illustrate the point. It should be noted further that they do not include income from hay or trees growing on inferior lands which the landlords invariably keep in their own possession.

| No. | Name of the Village. | Taluka. | No. of tenants examined. | Total land in possession of these tenants. (a. g.) | Assessment. (Rs. as. ps.) | | Total rent in maunds. | Value of rent in Rs. at Rs. 10/- per maund of paddy and Rs. 20/- per maund of Nagli and Vari. (Rs. as. ps.) | Ratio between assessment and rent. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | * Old Jawhar | Jawhar | 15 | 256 32¾ | 120 11 6 | Paddy | 35 | 350 0 0 | |
| | | | | | | Nagli | 30 | 600 0 0 | |
| | | | | | | Vari | 30 | 600 0 0 | |
| | | | | | | | Total | 1,550 0 0 | 1:13 |
| 2. | Kasa | Dahanu | 27 | 226 20¾ | 124 6 0 | Paddy | 450 | 4,500 0 0 | 1:36 |
| 3. | Kainad | " | 238 | 500 (Approx.) | 750 0 0 | " | 3,000 | 30.000 0 0 | 1:40 |
| 4. | Manor | Palghar | 19 | 86 38½ | 124 9 9 | " | 447 | 4,470 0 0 | 1:35 |
| 5. | Bangarchole | " | 7 | 44 4 | 47 10 3 | " | 154 | 1,540 0 0 | 1:32 |
| 6. | Sakhari | Mokhada | 9 | 154 13 | 22 5 0 | Paddy | 24¼ | 242 8 0 | |
| | | | | | | Nagli | 27½ | 550 0 0 | |
| | | | | | | Vari | 27½ | 550 0 0 | |
| | | | | | | | Total | 1,342 8 0 | 1:61 |
| 7. | Gonde Khurd | " | 10 | 103 15¾ | 33 2 0 | Paddy | 55¾ | 557 8 0 | |
| | | | | | | Nagli | 18¼ | 365 0 0 | |
| | | | | | | Vari | 18¼ | 365 0 0 | |
| | | | | | | | Total | 1,287 8 0 | 1:38 |

* Tenants in Jawhar Taluka, which was erstwhile a state, have to pay the amount of land revenue in addition to the usual rent.

If the income from hay and other miscellaneous produce of the land is taken into account, the average ratio would work out at about 1:50 or even higher in some places. In the village of Kainad, where I have been working for the last two and a half years, the total annual income of the landlords is Rs. 70,000 as against Rs. 1,400 which they pay to the Government as land revenue. While the Adiwasis and their cattle starve for want of food and fodder respectively, the landlords and the merchants make money by catering to the needs of the people of the towns and cities. The absentee landlords thus act as a drain on the natural wealth of the Adiwasi villages without giving anything in return.

The inherent injustice involved cannot be more patent! He who tills the land starves for a number of days in the year, while he who merely owns it enjoys a comfortable income. So long as this system continues, even genuine attempts of a constructive nature, for the amelioration of their condition will fail to evoke the proper response from amongst the Adiwasis, for they lack the necessary moral backing.

VASANT NARGOLKAR

[Note: Leaving aside the fundamental principle of Ethical Economics in respect of absentee landlordship and unearned incomes, the same principles should apply in case of failure to pay rent as in the case of any other debt. If A fails to pay his debt to B, B gets a money decree. In passing the decree the Court takes into account the actual condition of A, and applies principles of equity in a variety of ways. For instance, of easy instalments spread over a long period, of not attaching those means on which the debtor's living depends and so on. Even if a personal decree is passed, and the creditor gets the debtor arrested, he is sent to jail at the expense of the creditor. He is released if the creditor does not pay his ration-money or the debtor is prepared to apply for insolvency. And insolvency gives him a still easier discharge. In case of agriculturists, these equitable considerations have been further extended in a number of ways. For instance, the long-standing utterly abject condition of the debtor standing in contrast with the prosperous condition of the creditor, and the long history of progressive indebtedness of the former under the regime of the

latter is investigated and taken into account. In fact, the State regards these debtors as their special charge, whose well-being is to be guarded. Eviction from land for failure to pay the rental, which has become exhorbitant even at 1/3rd or 1/4th of the produce ought not to be allowed, unless there is evidence of fraudulent intentions against the landlord. It was on this principle that the Congress had insisted that lands which had been forfeited for non-payment of assessments on account of failure of crops in Kheda and for fighting inequitable increase of assessment in Bardoli must be returned to their original tenants. The right of even the Government to ultimate ownership over land was disputed; much more untenable is that of the absentee landlord. All land belongs to Gopal, and the man who actually tills it on His behalf must not be dispossessed of it as long as he is willing to do so. —K. G. M.]

HARIJAN

October 30 1949

## GANDHIJI'S CONCEPTION OF SWARAJ

(*BY M. K. Gandhi*)

The following question, which I have expanded a little without changing its spirit, was put to me the other day at a meeting of workers at Vile Parle (Bombay):

> "You say that the Swaraj of your conception will give equal justice to the prince and the peasant: it will protect both and safeguard the interests of both. Is not this sef-contradictory? Just look at the labourer and the employer, the master of the house and his servant; the brahman and the bhangi, the rich man and the pauper. Whichever side you turn your eyes, you notice a class-war. The conflict between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' seems to be going on since pre-historical times. It seems that it is impossible for a person to be happy without inflicting hardship on another. It appears to be the law of nature. You wish to alter the law of nature. Is it not an attempt as vain as striking your sword against the air?"

This is a good question and is possibly troubling many a mind. Let us consider it.

If there ever was something like *Ramaraj* in the world, it should be possible to restore it. I believe that it did exist one day. Here *Rama* means a *panchayat* (the council of five). God dwells in the *panchayat* because it represents public opinion. When the public opinion is free and unartificial, it is truthful. A State built upon public opinion is the *Ramaraj* for that area. We come across such relations even at present at some places. Some landholders excel their tenants in their simplicity and in working for their welfare. It is not that every king exploits his people. During my travels, I have come across both good and bad people. Every employer is not a heartless fellow. It is true that I have not seen several instances of rich men who behave as trustees or friends of the poor. I shall also admit that there is much scope for further improvement in the few that I have seen. But this is an experience gained in the atmosphere of a Satanic rule. So, there need be no wonder if there is only one good *Vibhishana* in *Lanka*. The point is that if there is one, you can expect to have many. When exceptions multiply, they become the rule. So this is my opinion as to what is possible. I know, however, that the questioner will not be satisfied with this answer..

The effort to bring into operation what is possible is *Satyagraha*. *Satya* is just. A just administration is *Satyayuga* (age of truth), *Swaraj*, *Dharma-raj*, *Ramaraj*, people's government. In such government, the ruler will be the protector, trustee and friend of the people. The difference between his life and that of the humble peasant will not be the difference between heaven and earth, as at present. There would be due sense of proportion between his palace and the peasant's hut. The difference between their respective wants would also be very small. Both of them will have pure water and air. The poor will get the food they need. The ruler will not relish the proverbial fifty-six dishes but will be satisfied with six. If the poor takes his food in earthen or wooden utensils, the ruler may take it in those of brass. But the ruler cannot use silver and gold utensils without exploiting the poor. The poor will get the necessary clothing; the ruler may have more suits, but the difference in quality must not be such as to cause jealousy. The children of the ruler and the peasant will learn in the same primary school. The former will not regard himself as the patron or benefactor of the people. He will not regard his services to his people as an obligation conferred upon them. There is no place for conferring obligations in the performance of one's duties. It is the duty of the ruler to serve his people.

What I have said about the ruler applies to all owners of wealth. Just as it is the duty of the ruler to be the trustee and friend of the people, so that of the latter is not to be jealous of the former. The poor man must know that to a great extent poverty is due to his own faults and short-comings. So while the poor man must strive to improve his condition, let him not hate the ruler and wish his destruction. He must wish for the ruler's reform. He must not want rulership for himself, but remain content by earning his own wants. This condition of mutual co-operation and help is the *Swaraj* of my conception.

In my opinion, in order to attain this *Swaraj*, it is necessary to bring about radical reforms in the training of both the ruler and the ruled. Both the exploiter and the exploited are groping in the dark. Both have lost their way. The condition of neither is tolerable. But it is difficult for the rulers and the rich to realize this. But I believe that if one party realizes the truth, the other will also have to do so, and so I have

chosen the service of the poor. It is not possible for all to be rulers. But every one can merge himself in the all. If the poor realize their rights and along with it their duties, we can have our *Swaraj* today. This realization cannot come as speedily through other methods as through *Satyagraha*. We have seen this with our own eyes during the last twelve months. To the extent we took to corrupt methods in the prosecution of that *Satyagraha*, we have obstructed the way to *Swaraj*.

*Satyagraha* is the greatest means of educating the public and awakening the people. *Stayagraha* also means self-purification. To the rulers we can only talk of self-purification. It will take time to produce any effect upon them. The poor are always in search of a guide; they know their own pains, but not the remedy. So they are willing to try whatever remedy is shown to them. In this situation, if they get a true friend, they do not leave him and follow his instructions to the best of their capacity; so, in a way, the poor man is a seeker. *Swaraj* is also attained through him. He has to know his strength, and having known it, to use it with restraint. When this happens, you may take it that the *swaraj* of my conception has been attained. When the people have attained that strength, they would be able to resist successfully both the foreign as well as the indigenous government.

The duty of the workers, therefore, is to serve the people. It can be done only through truth and non-violence. To the extent the means are impure the progress of the people will be obstructed.

In the meantime, if the ruler and the moneyed class will understand the spirit of the age, they will relinquish their private ownership of wealth and the ability to produce wealth and voluntarily make themselves trustees of the same; and since a trustee has also the right to earn his living, they would use that wealth for themselves only in a limited manner and to the extent of their wants. If they do not do so, the deadly struggle between the ruler and the ruled and the rich and the poor must inevitably go on. In the hope that *Satyagraha* would be able to check the advance of its poison, people like me have dedicated their all to that weapon.

(Translated from the Gujarati *Navajivan* dated 22-3-'31 under the caption of *The Prince and the Peasant*.)

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**To Harijan-Lovers of Hyderabad**

We are glad to inform the residents of Hyderabad (Deccan) town and state that they will now be able to pay their subscriptions for our three papers the *Harijan* (English), the *Harijansevak* (Hindi) and the *Harijanbandhu* (Gujarati) in Hyderabad itself. We have authorized Shri Ramkishan Dhut, Manager, Visvasta Sarvodaya Trust, Sultanbazar, Hyderabad to accept subscriptions and issue receipts on our behalf.

J. D.

## GANDHIJI'S ASSASSIN

The last judicial act in Gandhi murder case has been performed resulting in the sentence of death upon Nathuram Godse (by whose hands Gandhiji's life was brought to a close) and another accomplice named Apte. The Judges have regarded the latter as the brain working behind the scene and equally guilty with Godse. If the latter alone had to be tried, inasmuch as he was caught immediately and had also confessed his crime, the case was simple and the trial would have been finished long since. But since the police considered that it had enough material which showed that the act was the result of a conspiracy in which several others were also involved, the investigation and the hearing in the two Courts and the Privy Council together took up about a year and three quarters since the event.

Even before the trial had commenced, believers in non-violence and pacifists in India and abroad began to send letters or articles to the *Harijan* as well as, I believe, to prominent leaders urging that death penalty must not be imposed upon Godse, who was, until the trial had concluded, the only culprit known to the public. Some of Gandhiji's sons and son-like associates also gave expression to similar sentiments. But as the case was *sub judice*, it was not possible to discuss the matter publicly. Now that all judicial proceedings are over, I am free to write.

That even after losing in a very heartless and shocking manner their dearest and most respected Bapu, his sons and son-like associates, disciples and admirers should be moved by feelings of clemency towards one, who, in a personal way, was guilty of the greatest wrong against them, demonstrates to the religious-minded people the sublimation and balance which Gandhiji's teachings had brought about in the sentiments of his followers. It is possible that politically-minded people might regard this as a morbid and weak sentimentality. There would have been nothing unusual or abnormal if they had been moved by feelings of utmost hatred against the assassin and with a desire to even lynch him if there was an opportunity. Indeed, there might be some even now, who might be subject to feelings of that nature. These feelings are not abnormal. What is uncommon is the capacity to retain the balance of mind and restrain the emotions in the midst of gravest provocation. And it is difficult for a nation to get a greater provocation than the assassination of one, who was their country personified and greatest redeemer and guide. But he was also, as nearly as possible, Truth and Non-violence in a visible form and that spirit triumphed over the ordinary passions of those living in mental association with him, and made it impossible for feelings of hatred and revenge to get control over their noble sentiments. This might truly be claimed as *Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai* — Victory of Mahatma Gandhi.

Governments of the world, including that of our own country, are of course constituted on a different principle. Death for death is the primeval method of revenge, and the only thing which civilization has brought about is that the revenge is not taken directly by the friends of the victim, but by the State to which the victim belongs. As a general rule, death is avenged by death. It is only in exceptional cases in which Government shows clemency towards a murderer, and commutes the death sentence to a lighter one. Such cases generally have some factors, which, in spite of the murderous act, are sufficient to create a sense of sympathy for the culprits. When there are no such relieving features (as in the present case), governments do not generally intervene. The immediate issue before us is whether this is a proper case for the Government of India, as it is constituted, to exercise its prerogative of clemency in favour of Godse.

I think that it will be unanimously accepted that so far as Gandhiji's personal mental attitude was concerned, it may be safely assumed that he had granted free pardon to his murderer without his asking for it and without a moment's hesitation. That was one of the greatest aspirations of his life, and the manner in which he met his death and the description which Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and others gave of his facial expression after death, shows that he may be taken to have achieved that success over the natural animal instinct. If this murder had been the personal act of a man, who was somehow or other personally aggrieved against Gandhiji, the case might have stood on a different level. Even then the loss to the world would have been equally great. But having regard to the known attitude of Gandhiji himself endorsed by the spirit of forgiveness of Gandhiji's own relatives and disciples, the Government, whatever its own limitations in regard to the acceptance and application of non-violence, might have been moved to honour a petition of mercy presented by the assassin or his friends.

But this murder of the apostle of non-violence is not the personal and private act of an evil-minded individual. The assassin represented a political school of thought. Even if the particular conspiracy for which the various accused were tried was not proved as satisfactorily as the prosecution would have wished, it could not be gainsaid that this school regarded Gandhiji as a stumbling-block in its own political aspirations.

Under these circumstances, it is not to be wondered at if the Government, which has not yet abolished capital punishment and consequently almost every day hangs in one or another of its jails even private murderers and exercises its prerogative of mercy only under exceptional circumstances, finds it difficult to discover any reason for showing clemency towards a person, whose act has no redeeming feature in it. The man himself is unrepentant and does not want any clemency for himself. Can the Government go out of its own way to prevent the law from taking its course? And, if it does, can it hang any other person thereafter? For, as a crime, it is difficult to conceive of a more heinous act than that perpetrated by Gandhiji's assassin. It would amount to abolition of the death penalty without changing the law.

Speculations have been made as to what Gandhiji would have asked Government to deal with his assassin. Some of his associates hold that he would certainly have asked the Government not to hang his assassin. Others, who have lived and worked with Gandhiji as intimately as others, definitely think he would not have interfered with the discretion of Government, in spite of his own free pardon. He would not have said that 'for my sake' or 'for my personal satisfaction, please do not hang this murderer.' Both views are possible, and I for one would not like to speculate in the matter. In giving my view here, I express, therefore, my own way of thinking.

On grounds of pure principle, I feel that in hanging Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, there is something which positively takes away from the glory of the Mahatma and the dignity of his country. Hence, the granting of life to the murderer of its most beloved and most honoured Master even without his asking would be an act of supreme grace. But it is an act which only a Government trained by Gandhiji might dream of doing.

But it is likely to be interpreted by others as an act of imbecility and incapacity to govern. It is also attended with grave risks, and it can be taken only by those who are accustomed, when they have been convinced of a principle, to act upon it straightaway regardless of consequences and risks, or with preparedness to carry out the logical consequences of such a step. 'Practical' people, — and politicians are nothing if they are not practical people, — accustomed to apply prudential considerations to the tiniest acts, cannot easily reverse their gear and dare to act upon an abnormally high moral principle, particularly when it is beset with danger. They would respond to a moral principle, but cannot do what they feel would amount to falling a victim to it. In the present case the logical consequence of commuting the sentence would be abolition of the death penalty altogether. For, if that is not done, it would mean that in India, it is only the murder of a non-violent Mahatma which is not punishable with death. This is an inconsistency, which again only Gandhiji, a Mahatma that he was, could have had the boldness of perpetrating. He was capable of saying that he would allow other murderers to be hanged, but not his own or of a non-violent Mahatma. But the Indian Government cannot claim to be a Mahatma-government. Hence it would be difficult to find fault with the

Indian Government if it takes a political and prudential view of Godse's case, and refuses to exercise its prerogative. The way and circumstances in which the crime was perpetrated and celebrated is unfortunately so very wicked and heartless that there is no redeeming feature to arouse an ordinary worldly man's sympathy for the assassin.

However, there is another and a philosophical aspect of the murder also. I believe that every one of us is responsible for Gandhiji's death. By every one I include also those who were his close associates and not merely Congressmen, Hindu Mahasabhaites, Muslim Leaguers and others. For some time before his death, many people often thought that Gandhiji's life mission had ended. There were some who had even advised him to retire. That when his life really came to a sudden end, some of us felt the shock to be too great and like a thing which was never dreamt of, only shows that the previous thought was not seriously and wisely entertained. They wished a thing to happen, but were not prepared for its consequences. But the thought of the spirit is even more powerful than the accidental shot of a gun, and it is no use saying that one never intended its fructification. The mode of fructification, if not also as definitely conceived, may take any form. This thought about Gandhiji dispersed from several minds collected and concentrated itself in Godse, and made him the instrument of its execution. He became the executioner because he had trained himself for it for a long time. But we must confess that we all had a share in the shots which Godse's hands fired. Whether Godse himself is repentant or not, we at least must repent. Repentance apart, Godse will suffer what punishment the Government gives him as we are suffering the punishment of feeling helpless and despondent now, as a group of blind men would feel after having killed the only eyed man among them. That is God-given punishment to us as the sentence passed on the aasassin is man-given. The actual sin in either case will be washed away only when each of us, as also Godse, repents for himself. Godse's personal repentance may or may not come. But his sin is representative of an immoral and wicked ideology and training. It perverts a person into seeing righteousness in sin and contra. This sin will be washed only by the liquidation of that ideology. His execution or commutation into a lighter penalty cannot do it. It is an independent and fundamental thing. Consequently, Godse and Apte may well be regarded as just a physical medium of a thousand minds. If, therefore, they or their friends petition for mercy, I would be glad if the Government could see its way to consider it favourably. But I must confess that the circumstances are so complicated and intricate that I cannot find fault with it if it refuses to do so.

It is necessary to say a word about Apte. If Godse's sentence is commuted, Apte, I believe, would necessarily receive the same clemency. But his case can be treated even apart from that of Godse. I feel that Apte should not be put on an equal level with Godse. There is still a class of people who will put up Godse as a hero and a martyr. It is a perverse mentality, but it is there. It does not seem proper that Apte should get the same importance as Godse. Like *Shishupal* and *Ravana*, Godse has made a name which might live as long as Gandhiji's. Apte's need not be added to it. Let him live his natural span of life and allow believers in Providence to pray for the transformation of his character and ideas.

Before closing, I must say a word about the activities of some of the office-bearers of the Hindu Mahasabha. They certainly do not believe in the creed of non-violence. They hold that Gandhian non-violence is not supported by the *Gita* or the Vedic Hindu religion. They regarded Gandhiji as an enemy of the Hindus and had laid all sorts of base charges against him. They have proclaimed now that they had nothing to do with Gandhiji's murder and that it was Godse's individual act. They do not believe in the abolition of the death penalty and if they came to power, they would not condone the murder of a leader of the Hindu Mahasabha. Still one can understand their making to the Government a petition for mercy towards the convicted persons. But one of the office-bearers approached workers of Sevagram and Wardha and desired of them that having regard to Gandhiji's principles, they should move the Government to commute the sentence of death and to ask for Godse's transfer to Wardha or Nagpur to bring about a change in his views! Evidently, the representative's own views did not need any alteration. If Godse and his sympathizers have vision enough, they would see that before Godse's bullets pierced Gandhiji's heart, they pierced also the *Gita* and the Truth in Hindu religion. The first pierced the heart of the *Gita*, the second of the Truth in Hinduism and the third of Gandhiji. This hypocrisy would have otherwise been impossible.

Wardha, 17-10-'49 K. G. MASHRUWALA

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**Old Persian Manuscripts**

Sheikhsaheb Aminbahadur Sarkhezi writes to say that the four Persian manuscripts noted below written in the handwriting of his grandfather were presented by him to Gandhiji in 1938. But on account of political uncertainties, Gandhiji had returned them to him for safe custody. He has now, under the advice of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, presented them to the Central National Library at New Delhi, and scholars interested in the subject can study them now at that place:

3 volumes of *Hadiq-e-Ahmadi*
1 volume of *Hadiqatul-Hind*

K. G. M.

## RAILWAY TRAVELLING IN 1949

On the 18th of February 1949 I went from Bezwada to Guntur in Second Class. There were huddled into one compartment intended to seat eight persons more than thrice the number, viz. 25. I had them counted. On the 21st February 1949, I was travelling from Tenali to Madras in the Third Class by the Grand Trunk Express. In that compartment intended to seat 25 travellers, there were packed a lot more than thrice the number. In the corridor there were 14 persons and in the next room there were 23. These were counted and in the other two rooms there were many more and my friend could not go into them for counting purpose.

The entry into and exit from the two lavatories provided for this compartment caused severe bodily pains both to the users and the adjacent persons. As though this were not sufficient, there was no water in them. I requested friends getting down at Bitragunta and Gudur to report the matter to the guard. But it is not known whether they did so or not. We know it to our cost that no water was supplied.

The doors could not be opened. The ingress and egress were generally through the windows. It is an unusual feat even for healthy youngsters. The difficulties of children, women and aged persons, who had to go out for tiffin or meals, need not be told.

The military occupied some bogies in the Grand Trunk Express on the day in question and would not allow civilians in. They are the pampered children of the old British Imperialism. They have not forgotten their privileges and do not condescend to share the available space with us.

A pilgrim hailing from the North and going to Rameshwar created a terrible scene. He was occupying a certain seat. During his temporary absence, a fellow-traveller tired of standing, squatted upon the same. The pilgrim on his return laid violent hands on the intruder and was about to throw him. The attempt might have succeeded but for the timely intervention of passengers nearby. No police was available to afford any protection.

This was not an exceptional case with one compartment or bogie; the whole Grand Trunk Express was packed with men, women and children like sardines in a closed grand trunk. We could not change into a higher class as there was overcrowding even there.

These are not the experiences of one day or week. But they are the common experiences of the travelling public for months and years together.

The railway surpluses are the contributions made out of the drops of sweat and blood of such helpless and voiceless passengers. One of them remarked to me, "It is good you are experiencing them. People like you should suffer more; it is only then that we shall have some redress." I do not know if this prophecy will come true. Out of these budgets, the ever-hungry railway staff press for increments in salaries and allowances and the balance, if any, goes to the general revenues, the wretched conditions of Second and Third Class travel continuing as before. The budget discussions provide interesting but pathetic reading — enumeration of grievances by persons who have not realized them and assurances by the Government of remedial measures which do not strike at the root of the matter. The whole thing is unreal and is enacted from year to year.

The re-naming of Inter Class as Second has not led to any improvement whatsoever. Rather, it has led to regrettable developments. The required number of compartments has not been provided. The overcrowding in the trains is paying to the Government and is on a par with overcrowding in private trams and buses. This latter is condemned as illegal. Why not the former? Is not Government responsible both civilly and criminally? The railway rates have increased but no commensurate improvement has taken place in the amenities provided for Third Class passengers who form the largest group and who contribute the greatest amount.

There is also an invidious distinction in nomenclature. The sign-boards of First and Second Class waiting rooms are "For Ladies" and "For Gentlemen". Is it not high time that all passengers in Free India (not only the moneyed people) are recognized and treated as ladies and gentlemen? These labels should be forthwith removed and substituted by First and Second Class Passengers (men or women, as the case may be).

Our legislators, ministers and leaders have permanently taken to air travel, First Class in railways and luxurious cars for short distances. It has become impossible for them to realize the difficulties of the less fortunate or even to imagine them.

30-8-'49 G. SITARAMSASTRY

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